

# See The Podiatrist



## The Fungus Among Us

(NAPSA)—Do ugly toenails make you feel embarrassed to wear sandals, or walk barefoot? Do you polish your toenails to hide them?

Ugly toenails could be an indication of a fungal infection under the nail. Studies estimate that between 2 percent and 13 percent of American adults have this type of fungal infection, and the prevalence increases with age. In fact, nearly 40 percent of people age 75 have a nail fungal infection, and it is approximately twice as common in men as women. Incidences also increase with patients using antibiotics, diabetic patients and those with depressed immune systems, such as organ transplant recipients.

Nail fungal infections usually appear as a discoloration under the nail. There also may be an accumulation of a chalky substance underneath the nail that presents a foul odor. A less common form of this infection makes the entire surface of the nail appear white and chalky. Fungal nail infections are more than a cosmetic problem, however. If left untreated, they can make walking and wearing shoes very painful.

Podiatrists, specialists trained to treat medical and surgical disorders of the foot and ankle, can help. There are many treatments your podiatrist may choose to prescribe. There are oral antifungal medications in pill form and topical treatments that are applied directly to the nail. Your podiatrist will prescribe the therapy or combination of therapies that best suits your case.



**Those ugly toenails can become serious and very uncomfortable if left untreated.**

Although a nail fungal infection may be successfully treated, individuals who have had the condition once should be especially careful about being reinfected. If you contract the disease once, you remain susceptible throughout life, so regular visits to a podiatrist are essential to maintain nail health. Your podiatrist may prescribe a maintenance regimen to keep your toenails free of infection.

Here are a few tips to lower your risk of fungal infection:

- Always trim your toenails straight across
- Avoid tight-fitting shoes
- Change shoes daily
- Disinfect your shoes regularly with disinfectant spray
- Avoid walking barefoot in locker rooms, hotels or other public places

Remember, fungal infections are more than a cosmetic problem! They can be painful, so see your podiatrist at the first sign of ugly nails to avoid serious discomfort.